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Smart Tips for Traveling with Young Children

November 23, 2015 by Liz O'Connell

'Tis the travel season. For some, the thought of taking a trip with young kids is a daunting one. (Are images of screaming and crying children flashing in your mind? That's a natural reaction. Don't worry, keep reading.)

Here's the good news, with a little preparation, traveling with young children can actually be an enjoyable experience. Before you pack your bags and hit the road for grandmother's house, consider these tips to keep your kiddos happy and avoid a holiday headache.

Keep Them Busy

The more items you have to keep your youngsters distracted, the less likely they'll wander off, throw a temper-tantrum or even worse, have a breakdown. (Not to say this tip will eliminate that possibility, but whatever helps beat the odds, right?)

A bag of goodies is key: small toys (preferably new—or new to them—so they'll be more intrigued), dry snacks, coloring books, crayons and games. There are plenty of [kid-friendly game apps](#) for your tablet or smartphone, many of which are free! Don't forget the headphones!

Pro tip: Gift wrap toys so they're even more excited to open them.

Have Extra Clothing Handy (for You Too)

Accidents happen (illness, diaper blowouts, I won't go on), so make sure you have quick and easy access to an extra change of clothes for both you and your kids. Being the source of an unpleasant odor on a cramped airplane or in a packed vehicle is not fun for anyone. Make room in your carry-on or suitcase that's not packed at the bottom of your trunk to stay clean and dry. Don't forget the wipes!

For Flying Families:

Before you book. The holidays may not be the best time to be picky about which flights to take—you may have fewer options during high-travel season (that won't cost you an arm and a leg). If you're fortunate to have more choices, here's a couple things to consider when booking:

- If your kids take routine naps or get tired at a certain time of the day, aim to fly during that time-frame.
- Avoid layovers. Flying nonstop will prevent you from getting off the plane with your luggage, navigating another airport and re-settling on a new plane.
- Book through an airline or travel site that lets you reserve your seat. This way, you can make sure your family sits together and everyone has enough room. Reserving seats in a bulkhead row—the first row of seats, for example, gives you more legroom for a bassinet or for your little one to stand up.

Pack light. Think about how much you can realistically carry. Not only is it a hassle to lug around a lot of luggage, but there is only a limited amount of overhead storage on a full flight. Extra tip: Pack big winter coats in a checked bag once you arrive at the airport.

Get your ducks in a row. Before you leave the house, check the status of your flight so you know if it's on time, delayed or worse, canceled. Also, checking in online and printing your boarding passes ahead of time allows you to skip the ticket counter and head straight to security.

Give yourself time. Holiday traffic at the airport can be hectic for those flying solo, let alone having the kids in tow. The golden air-travel rule of allowing yourself extra time couldn't be more important. Not having to rush makes everything else a lot easier.

Formula, breast milk and juice. The [liquids rule](#) (3.4 ounces or less per item) in your carry-on doesn't apply when it comes to breast milk, formula and juice. Pack as much as you need (the TSA recommends only packing the amount you need for the duration of your flight), but make sure you separate it from your other carry-on liquids and notify a TSA officer when you go through screening. Visit the [TSA's website](#) for more details.

Board early. There's usually an opportunity to pre-board if you need extra time to get to your seat. Take advantage of this to get everyone situated!

Prepare for ear popping. If you're a frequent flyer, you're familiar with the ear popping that happens as the plane ascends or descends, but your little ones may not know how to relieve the pressure. Since gum shouldn't get into the hands (or mouths) of kids under the age of five, milk or juice during takeoff and landing is a good alternative. Or if you're still nursing, that helps too.

Try to relax. We know you're desperately trying to avoid the death stares from other passengers when your child acts up or breaks down, but there is only so much you can do. Remember, you won't be able to appease everyone on the plane. So, even if your kids aren't on their best behaviors, try to relax and enjoy your trip.

OK, we've covered the basics, but here's a [longer checklist of questions](#) to ask your airline to make flying with youngsters as pleasant as possible.

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